

PAPERS READ
BEFORE THE
LANCASTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 1912.

"History herself, as seen in her own workshop."

ISAAC L. WILLIAMS, ARTIST AND PORTRAIT
PAINTER.

BENJAMIN WEST HENRY, A LANCASTER ARTIST.
LEON VON OSSKO.

JASPER GREEN, ILLUSTRATOR.

W. SANFORD MASON, ARTIST.

WILLIAM PORTER STEELE.

MINUTES OF NOVEMBER MEETING.

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Isaac L. Williams, Artist and Portrait Painter.

As the subject of my sketch is not found mentioned in any of the encyclopedias or journals at present extant, it was necessary to collect the data here gathered from relatives and personal friends of him and from the works he left as testimonials of himself and his life, and in my butterfly-bee-like flitting hither and thither for knowledge and information of my story I am indebted to a number of good people of our city, as well as some few of other cities, and to one who has adjourned to that distant city from which no traveler has yet returned (I refer to Mr. H. C. Burrowes, who, just a few days before his last illness, gave me most helpful information and the privilege to examine the portraits of his renowned father and dear mother, as done by Mr. Williams, the subject of our conference and of my sketch. We met him on Grant street, on the pavement of the Woolworth building, as we were just starting on our way to his home. We owe him thanks for information which probably would not otherwise have been received.) I wish to make special acknowledgment to Miss Clark, who accompanied me on my various tours of portrait inspection, as well as for information concerning them; also to Miss Holbrook, Mr. Diffenderffer and Mr. Hensel for help thus received. Mr. Diffenderffer, who knew Mr. Williams personally, and watched him

daily at his work, very kindly gave me his personal recollections. These I shall make use of freely.

If a large patronage is an indication of success, then Mr. Williams was a very great success. In his native city, Philadelphia, many paintings done by him can be found; a great many in the Pennsylvania Historical Society; in Lancaster, I have found a great many which later I shall mention; in England, where he was called by an English nobleman, who had seen and admired his work in Philadelphia, he painted several landscape views, among which is Tom Moore's cottage, now owned and in the possession of the Misses Holbrook in our town.

Isaac L. Williams, without the L., was the real name of the artist. The L was added because of another man of the same name living in his community. To avoid confusion, especially in mail and correspondence matters, the letter L as a middle initial was used by him. Although not born in Lancaster, Mr. Williams was in many ways closely allied professionally to the city and county. Being a native of Philadelphia, however, he does belong to the State, and, as one of his friends says of him, he stands in the front rank, with the pencil and brush, of our Commonwealth's artists. Quoting, the same friend says of him: "He does not come before us with the glamor and prestige of a century or two behind him to proclaim his merits and exact his fame, but presents himself to us in *propria persona*, as one of us known to hundreds still living, who knew the man, saw him at his work, and learned to esteem him as a man while they admired his skill as it came rapidly into view from his studio."

Isaac L. Williams was born in the

city of Philadelphia, on June 24, 1817. His early literary education was received in a private school in that city. This private instruction continued only until his fifteenth year, when he became a pupil of Mr. Smith, artist, who was at that time considered the ablest teacher of drawing in Philadelphia. So rapid was his progress in this line that his friends induced him to take up the more difficult and higher branch of art, that of portraiture. This he did under the tuition of Mr. John Neagle, a noted portrait painter, who had a large and eminent patronage. Mr. Neagle married the daughter of Sully, the great artist. Some of the early portraits painted by Mr. Williams have been regarded as among the best examples of his style, which closely followed that of his preceptor, Neagle. A copy of one of his portraits, that of Richard Penn Smith, showing to a degree in what regard he was held as an artist, is to be found in Burton's Gentleman's Magazine for September, 1839. The engraved portrait accompanies a biography of Richard Penn Smith, provost of the University of Pennsylvania. The text below the portrait says: "The accompanying engraving is made from an admirable likeness by Williams, a young artist of great promise in this city."

Mr. Williams loved his profession, and was successful in it because he loved it. The beautiful, whether in nature or art, appealed to him, and he lived idealized in its atmosphere. His brush and pencil were never idle, from the day he took up the artist life. In time, too, he became a teacher of his beloved art. For many years he taught drawing in private schools as well as in his studio. He worked very hard, and accomplished the re-

ward of his work. He was the first preceptor of the late Henry E. Abbey, of whom he says, "Young Abbey was an erratic, wayward pupil, who devoted most of his student hours to drawing elfish, impish and outlandish-looking figures on the margin of his drawing books." Abbey was probably gifted beyond the ordinary lot of mortals, and his genius sufficient unto itself, without the irksome routine of books and copy drill. His latest efforts are immortalized in the new Capitol at Harrisburg.

Mr. Williams painted landscapes as well as portraits, and perhaps just as numerous. By many his landscapes are considered superior to his portraits. It was his custom in summer time to make extended tours in search of the beautiful and picturesque. He made journeys along the Susquehanna, the Juniata and our own Conestoga. No doubt, these rambles included the most charming of all rambles to be found anywhere—out the Willow Street pike and Steinman's road; across the fields to Indian Rock and back again by way of Media Hills and Engleside. He would gather wild roses and honeysuckles, daisies and haw and dogwood and barberry and a thousand other things, and probably later in the year, after a warm rain, abundant mushrooms. The Green Mountains, the Adirondacks and the Catskills, Lake Champlain and the rocky islets on the coast of Maine, were well known to him. These he used as studies for landscapes.

His efforts found scope beyond his native country. In 1866, at the invitation of an English nobleman, he visited Great Britain, to paint the country homestead of that gentleman. It was during this visit that he painted Tom Moore's cottage, spoken of be-

fore. He visited France and Italy before returning home, no doubt absorbing the glory and the grandeur in those treasure galleries where the old-time masters are immortalized. He remained in Europe almost a year.

Among the more notable of his historical pictures are the "Castle of Baiae" and the "Ruins of Cumae." He also painted a series of views of the historical mansions of Philadelphia. These are what were mentioned as now in the possession of the State Historical Society. They include:

Spruce Street Hall of the Historical Society of Philadelphia.

Washington's Residence, Germantown—1793.

Friends' Alms House, Walnut street, 1729-1876.

Whitefield House, Nazareth.

Sisters' House, Bethlehem.

The Church of "Augustus," at the "Trappe," Montgomery county, Pennsylvania.

Floating Bridge at Gary's Ferry.

Friends' Meeting House at Merion.

Blue Anchor Inn, N. W. corner Front and Dock street.

Friends' Alms House, 308-322 Walnut street.

Widows' House, Bethlehem.

Valley Forge in the Autumn, 1853.

Valley Forge in the Winter, 1858.

Besides these, the society has the portrait of Townsend Ward.

Another of his portraits, in the possession of Hon. Samuel Pennypacker, is that of Mr. Pennypacker's mother

Mr. Williams in Lancaster.

Mr. Williams came to Lancaster in 1854, with a commission to paint a portrait of the Rev. Father Bernard Keenan, the pastor of the St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church. He was known to only a few Lancastrians at

that time, one of whom was his brother-in-law, the late M. D. Holbrook, and the other, Samuel H. Reynolds, of the Lancaster Bar. They introduced him to many of our citizens, who promptly made him feel at home in his new surroundings. His friend, Mr. Dufferffer, whom I have quoted before, says of him: He distinctly remembers seeing the venerable prelate climbing the stairs that led to the studio every few days until the portrait was completed. During the interval, however, Mr. Williams, who was of a social nature, made the acquaintance of his neighbors on the first floor, and, finding among them some who were also interested in his art, books and kindred subjects, he soon became one of a little group that saw each other almost daily. As the Keenan portrait approached completion some of these friends were asked to take a look at it and express their opinion about it. There was only one opinion, and that was that the face on the canvas was a genuine likeness of the original. This was the view, also, that was taken by the general public when the work was finished, and the result was that a great many of the wealthy parishioners of St. Mary's handed in their names with orders for copies. I have been able to locate only the original of these portraits. Although a thorough investigation was made, they all seem to have entirely disappeared. Mrs. Frank B. McClain retains the original and the only one of these portraits that has been found. The further result was that many other persons had the portraits of themselves, wives and children painted. Among these are two wee maidens, just outgrowing babyhood, well known to us all—one holding a basket, the other her hat filled with flowers, taken

in the style very much in vogue at that time, a short while ago. The one, dainty Miss Flinn, showing even in her babyhood the conquering sweetness which later subdued the stern heart and fastidious eye of our worthy and honorable one-time Attorney General and leader of the Lancaster Bar; the other sweet, grave face was that of Miss Agnes Kelly, patron and saint—both have passed to the great spirit land of the vast beyond.

Mr. Williams' easel was never empty, and what had been intended as a brief stay in this city extended itself to almost a year, with much credit to his reputation as an artist and the equally welcome credit to his bank account. His first visit to Lancaster was not his last one. He had become a favorite with the people here, and they made further demands upon his services, necessitating several later visits. It would be difficult to ascertain after this long lapse of years just how many portraits of Lancastrians came out of his studio. I have been able to locate quite a number of them, but by no means do I think I have found them all. They consist of the following, the most of which belonging to any one family being in the possession of the Misses Holbrook, nieces of Mr. Williams:

Mr. M. D. Holbrook, large size.

Mrs. M. D. Holbrook, large size.

Mr. M. D. Holbrook, cabinet size.

Mrs. M. D. Holbrook, cabinet size.

Two young children of Mr. and Mrs. Holbrook.

Three daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Holbrook.

Copy of Tom Moore's Cottage (which I have mentioned before).

Dr. F. A. Muhlenberg.

Frank Muhlenberg.

Mr. Patrick Kelly.

Mrs. Patrick Kelly.
John Murray, a stepbrother.
Isaac E. Hiester.
Mr. Thomas C. Wiley,
Mrs. Thomas C. Wiley.
Mr. William M. Wiley.
Mrs. William M. Wiley.
Mr. Reah Frazer.
Mr. Patrick McEvoy.
Mrs. Patrick McEvoy.
Mr. Isaac Burrowes.

Miss Harriett Burrowes (daughter
of Dr. Francis Burrowes).

Dr. Thomas H. Burrowes,
Mrs. Thomas H. Burrowes.
Governor Ritner.

Governor Francis R. Shunk.

Rev. Dr. C. R. Krauth,
Mrs. W. U. Hensel (as a child).

Miss Agnes Kelly (as a child).

Mr. Williams painted the portrait
of Dr. Thomas H. Burrowes and that
of Thaddeus Stevens in 1856, an ar-
rangement having been made between
the two friends that the portraits
should be exchanged, Dr. Burrowes
keeping that of Mr. Stevens and Mr.
Stevens taking Dr. Burrowes. After
the death of Mr. Stevens these por-
traits were re-exchanged. Mr. Ste-
vens' reverting to his housekeeper at
her request. I think I must have
made the lives of some of our people
miserable setting them to work hunt-
ing up this portrait from North street,
where I was told it could be found, to
Howard avenue on the way back. (It
has since been found. Dr. Gilbert
Parker sent word from Philadelphia
that it was in his possession).

Mr. Williams was married at Har-
risburg, November 26, 1844, by Rev.
Edward Conovey to his cousin, Miss
Dorinda Avice Adams. Four chil-
dren were born of this marriage, twin
daughters and two sons. All are
dead. Two grandchildren and three

great-grandchildren are living. It is said of him that he was a model family man, devoted to his wife and children and a favorite with little folks wherever he met them. His friend says of him, through the sunshine and shadows of nearly sixty years his recollections wander back to the time of his first appearance in this community. He remembers him as tall and slender of form, wise, witty, with a vocabulary that was wonderful in its copiousness and a voice clear and musical. Genial in disposition and social in his intercourse with his fellow-men; well-informed and easy of approach, he was a comrade well met. As he was then, his kindly portrait still hangs on the friendly walls of memory, unforgotten and unforgettable. Some estimate of the esteem and regard in which he was held by his brother artists in Philadelphia may be had in the fact that in 1869 he was elected to the presidency of the Artists' Fund Society, a position he held for twenty years or more.

Mr. Williams pursued his profession until within a few days of his death, which occurred on April 22, 1895.

Benjamin West Henry, A Lancaster Artist.

The ancestors of Benjamin West Henry were Robert and Mary A. Henry, his wife, who emigrated from Scotland to Pennsylvania in 1722, and settled in Chester County. They were accompanied by their three sons, John, Robert and James. John, the eldest son, married in Chester county, Elizabeth Devinny, in 1728.

William Henry, their son, so well known to all Lancaster county historians, moved from Chester County and married Ann wood, of Darby.

The Store and Residence.—In the Recorder's Office Book XI, page 575, is a deed from Alexander Stedman to William Henry, on February 7, 1760, for a house fronting on Market Place, twenty-two feet two inches, and one hundred and twenty-five feet deep, to a fourteen-foot alley; on the east, by the house of Rudy Stoner; on the west, by another fourteen-foot alley.

This alley was called "Moravian Alley," and ran out to West King street, then High street. Market Place was the piece of ground now occupied by the City Hall, and the old Market House, which was not built until 1790, the consideration £350. Alexander Stedman lived in Philadelphia and was a partner of W. H. Steigel (known as Baron Steigel) under the name of Steigel & Stedman, at Elizabeth Furnace.

William Henry died intestate. On April 18th, 1809, in the settlement of

his estate by his son, William Henry, this property is described as follows:

"In the Market Square, bounded Westward by Moravian Alley, and East, by a lot of Jonas Metzger." Appraised at 758 pounds, 60 and 8 pence.

In the Life of William Henry, by Francis Jordan, Jr., page 27, we quote the following interesting sketch of the early friendship Mr. Henry entertained for the artist, Benjamin West:

"West was then about fifteen, a poor, unlettered tinsmith's apprentice, living in the nearby hamlet of Springfield, Pa., where he was wont to exhibit his undeveloped talent in decorating the fences and barndoors of the neighborhood with drawings, and by an occasional rude painting for a tavern signboard.

"As the first to recognize in these maiden efforts genius of a high order, Colonel Henry invited the boy to his house, assigned a room to his use, and supplied the materials essential to his work. On the walls of this apartment were many little studies, that were permitted to remain until the house was demolished. Here West made a number of excellent attempts at portraiture, of which two examples, Col. Henry and Mrs. Henry, are in the possession of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania."

Mr. Henry paid the compliment of naming his thirteenth and youngest child Benjamin West, the subject of this sketch, who was born June 8th, 1777, and married August 24th, 1794, by the Rev. Elisha Rigg, rector of St. James P. E. Church, Lancaster, to Miss Catharine Hoofnagle.

Probably Mr. Henry studied his art under Gilbert Stuart, and when West was honored by the appointment as the successor of Sir Joshua Reynolds as president of the Royal Academy,

he invited his namesake to visit him in London.

Not much is known of the life of Mr. Henry as an artist, as the only portrait painted by him that has been found or heard of is that of his eldest brother, William Henry, Esq., and is now in the Pennsylvania Historical Society in Philadelphia.

In the early records of the Masonic Lodge, No. 43, F. and A. M., of this city, upon the building of a new hall in the early part of the year 1798, Benjamin West Henry was authorized to paint a symbolical floor cloth for the furnishing of the Lodge, at an expense of £11, 5s 10p. This floor cloth was in use for many years in the lodge room.

Benjamin West Henry was made a Mason in Lodge No. 43 on November 8th, 1797; elected Junior Warden December, 1798; elected Senior Warden June, 1799, and served until June, 1802, when he was chosen Worshipful Master, which position he held for one year.

He died December 28th, 1806, in Lancaster, leaving three children. On April 24th, 1809, the Court appointed William Fitzpatrick, of Lancaster, and John Huffnagle, of Philadelphia, merchants, guardians over the person and estate of James, Anna Wood and Mary Henry, minor children of the deceased.

Judge John Joseph Henry was the brother of Mr. Henry. He served under Arnold in the campaign against Quebec, enduring all the hardships of war, at the early age of seventeen years, and later studied law and became President Judge of the Second Judicial District of Pennsylvania, an appointment of Governor Thomas Mifflin, succeeding William Atlee.

Leon von Ossko.

von Ossko, Leon: Artist, traveller, scholar and linguist. Born at Heilbron, Germany; died at St. Augustine, Florida, 1906.

Possessed of an equable disposition, vast erudition, an innate love of mankind and a lively interest in all that concerned his adopted city, it is small wonder that this artist-nobleman enjoyed the widest acquaintance among Lancastrians and ranked as a most popular and prominent citizen. Mr. von Ossko was of noble lineage and held the rank of Baron in the Hungarian peerage. His title was not an empty one, but awarded his family for its splendid service to their country in its memorable conflict with the Turks.

His mother was obliged to leave Hungary by reason of the rigors of the climate and was sojourning on one of the family's estates, located on a beautiful island near Heilbron, when Leon was born. Much of his early life was passed in Germany and in travel. Notwithstanding a congenital visual disorder, he was an ardent student and was graduated from Heidelberg, winning exceptional distinction at that renowned University. As a linguist he was most accomplished, speaking fluently nine languages. During his residence in Lancaster he was often a contributor to periodicals and magazines and had an unusually facile pen. He was a man of great charm and attractive personality. His travels had taken him to all parts of

the world, not as a dilettante, but as a serious student of affairs and conditions. His information concerning the places he had visited was stupendous.

Mr. von Ossko first visited America as a sightseer with a party of noblemen, shortly after his graduation from Heidelberg. Much time was spent in the West and, in order to better see the country and familiarize themselves with its people and conditions, the journey from Denver to the Pacific coast was made on horseback. During this overland trip the young noblemen endured many hardships uncomplainingly, and enjoyed several thrilling adventures with wild animals and Indians. Mr. von Ossko was seriously wounded in an encounter with a hostile band of marauding Indians while viewing the West from a pony's back. After two years spent in travel throughout America, the party returned to Europe.

In 1884 Mr. von Ossko and Miss Ella Louisa Breneman, daughter of the late well-known Lancastrian, Mr. Christian Herr Breneman, were married at Florence, Italy, after a prolonged and romantic courtship, which extended from Denver to Paris and Nice and culminated at Florence. A residence of four years in Florence followed this marriage.

Mr. von Ossko studied art under the guidance of Professor Costa, of Florence, and later with the celebrated Florentine painter, Senor Lari, completing his studies at the famous Academy Julian, in Paris. He was an artist of rare and unquestioned ability and his hospitable studio in Lancaster was a place of great charm. A ready sale of flattering prices always awaited the products of his deft brush, and many superb specimens of his skill

in oil and water colors are to be seen in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Cincinnati and other cities. One of his most meritorious and perhaps best-known pictures, a gem in still life, represents a door hung with the trappings of a devotee of the chase. The door is shown partly ajar with a hand resting on its edge and a figure dimly outlined in shadow through the crevice, as though about to enter the foreground of the picture. This painting is now among the art treasures of the Auditorium Theatre at Baltimore. It is exhibited there with steps leading up to the door, and it is said that the effect is so wonderful realistic that the management has been obliged to take precautions against the repeated attempts to walk through the door. This artist worked with equal facility in oil and water colors, but evidenced his greatest skill in his beautiful art with water colors. His numerous portraits of prominent Lancastrians are splendid testimonials of his exceptional skill in portraiture. His pleasing and accurate drawing and exquisite eye for color is conspicuous in all of this popular artist's work.

Jasper Green.

Jasper Green, son of Evan Green and Isabella Slaymaker, was born in Columbia, Pa., January 31, 1829, and died in Philadelphia, March 2, 1910. He married Elizabeth Shippen, daughter of Samuel Boude and — Elder. In early manhood he was interested in wood carving and illustrated for the "Fatherland Series" of children's stories. During the Civil War he was in the War Department at Washington and special correspondent for Harper's Weekly, to which he contributed scenes connected with the various battles, many of which were double page pictures. Frequently he exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Mrs. Hugh Elliott, of Cambridge, Mass., whom we know as Elizabeth Shippen Green and with whose illustrations we are familiar, is a daughter.

W. Sanford Mason.

W. Sanford Mason, son of Sanford Mason and Henrietta Hailer Brasson, was of distinguished New England ancestry, and was born in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1824, and died in Philadelphia, Pa., in 1864. He went to Columbia to sketch river scenery, and in 1853 married Elizabeth Strickler Weaver, daughter of George Weaver and Mary Strickler. He ranked high as an artist, painting both portrait and scenery, but his specialty was portraits. In the Philadelphia Cathedral hangs one of his pictures. He painted a view of Columbia from the hills west of town that was subsequently lithographed. His two children, Mrs. Chas. Bayler and George Mason, reside in York.

William Porter Steele.

William Porter Steele was the eldest child of Captain John (Jr.) and Jane Porter Steele, of Harmony Hall, Lancaster county. He was born November 4, 1817, and died in New York City, November 28, 1864. He was buried in old Leacock Churchyard on the King's Highway through Lancaster county. He was graduated at Rutgers College and studied law in Lancaster. He was married to Frances Chase Barney, daughter of Commander Barney, U. S. N. His second wife was Elizabeth Harris, daughter of Dr. Frank Harris, of New York City. Besides portrait painting, he was an interpreter, on canvas, of Shakespeare plays, and was also a painter of animal life. He was a fine linguist, brilliant in conversation and had a charming personality.

Minutes of the November Meeting.

Lancaster, Pa., Nov. 1.

The regular monthly meeting of the Lancaster County Historical Society was held this evening in the regular place of convening. President Steinman presided.

The librarian, Miss Bausman, presented the following report:

Magazines and Pamphlets—American Philosophical Society; American Catholic Historical Society; Linden Hall Echo; International Conciliation, two numbers; Carnegie Library, Pittsburgh, Classified Catalogue, Part I; Carnegie Library, Pittsburgh, Monthly Bulletin; Grand Rapids Public Library Monthly Bulletin; New York Public Library Monthly Bulletin; lot of papers and toll collections of the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad, 1833 to 1835, from Julius F. Sachse, of Philadelphia. The following papers were contributed by Christian E. Metzler, of Boston: A prospectus for a German newspaper, *The Lancaster Eagle*, May 4, 1826, with a partial list of the original subscribers, etc.; a programme of the nineteenth anniversary of the Diagonthian Literary Society, May 26, 1854; Certificate No. 214 for ten shares capital stock of Farmers' Bank of Lancaster, in name of Anna Magdalen Meyer dated August 14, 1822; a circular letter by the Democratic County Committee to the township committees in 1862.

Samuel R. Fraim and Miss Bertha L. Cochran of this city, and H. H. Shenck, of Manheim, were elected to membership, and the names of the following were proposed: Miss Mary S. Graeff, 662 West Orange street, this city; Robert B. Kegerrise, Richland, Pa.; J. N. K. Hickman, 630 West Orange street; Mrs. J. N. K. Hickman,, 630 West Orange street, this city; Mrs. Charles R. Kline, 302 North Lime street, this city.

Following the business session the following papers on Early Lancaster County Artists were read: Benjamin West Henry, written by Mr. George Steinman and read by Miss Martha B. Clark; Isaac L. Williams, by Miss Adaline B. Spindler; Leon von Ossko, by Harry Breneman, read by Miss Clark; Jasper Green and W. Sanford Mason, by Miss Lillian Evans, and read by Mrs. M. N. Robinson; William Porter Steele, read by Miss Susan Frazer.

Adjourned.



